WORLD COMMUNION
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Isaiah 25:6-9; Luke 24:28-35

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All the theological rhetoric in the world is not as persuasive on the subject as that one extraordinary photograph of the earth taken by the astronauts from the surface of the moon. There we are: a look in the cosmic mirror - from the perspective of a quarter of a million miles. There we are - as God sees us: a beautifully, glistening life support system, protected by atmosphere, laced with water and oxygen and carbon dioxide, glowing with the good, green hew of living things; alone in space perhaps, but clearly and more importantly - an interdependency, a unit, a whole, a family.

It has been a very long time coming to fruition - that vision of the wholeness of the human situation. It has been God's favorite project from the beginning. Those who have known him best have understood it. The prophet Isaiah saw it - with his marvelous vision of the whole family reunited around a banquet table laden with food. Jesus saw it and wept because no one shared the vision.

There are today simple, factual reasons for acknowledging the oneness of the race. The once vast globe can be transversed in hours. Lord Nelson's first adventure in the British Navy in the late 18th century was to confront and do battle with the Spanish at the Falkland Islands. When the fleet in which Nelson was a sailor arrived at the Falklands, the Spanish had long since departed. The trip had taken two years. Before the Second World War contact between Hawaii and the mainland was limited to one TWA clipper flight per week.

Most of us have dialed and communicated across those same distances instantly.

The human family is close, not simply philosophically, but technologically and, of course, militarily. Weapons designed to protect one nation from another nation have made us terribly one because in William Sloan Coffin's unforgettable imagery, "The World is now the target."

We are one family. We are on this space ship earth together. At no other time in our entire long history have we been so vividly and poignantly aware of the interrelatedness of the whole human family. Perhaps that is why the reality of the brokenness, the alienation, the hatred, weighs so heavily. Perhaps God has brought us this far precisely so that we can see the horror of what we have done and continue to do with the wholeness he has created. It wasn't the first massacre in history. It didn't even approach being the worst. But it will rank among the most unbearable, precisely because we know now, as never before, that we are related to those people - the murdered, and the murderers.

How, in God's name to change? How, today, October 3, 1982, to do anything which might make it different for our grandchildren, or Russian, or Chinese, or Cuban grandchildren?

We have to think new thoughts. The old ones don't work anymore. And it is a particular sin to cling to them simply because we are used to clinging to them. Survival forced families to be a little less fiercely families in order to be tribes. Survival forced tribes to relinquish tribalism in order to be nations. And now survival requires a little less nationalism and much more humanism. Our ability to make war - our capacity to make war with nuclear

weapons, has made the nation - as a unit of survival, at least, nearly obsolete. The process seems to be starting and given a ghost of a chance it will work. There is not one nation on earth capable of dealing with the complexity of the Middle East. A multinational force is, at this moment, keeping the peace. We must think anew. For Christians that is often a matter of thinking traditionally. The Bible sees us as one family. The Bible has always described our sin as the unwillingness to live together in the harmony God created.

We must think anew, and if we want it to be different ever, we must embrace the ties with one another which Jesus Christ has already created. He has already made his church one - across the lines of nation and race. To think anew means to stop thinking parochially about the church of Jesus Christ: to recognize as not only silly and sad, but also sinful, any notion that God wants only Lutherans at communion, or Catholics, or Presbyterians; or that somehow there is any difference that matters because of pigmentation, or place of birth.

In 1900, there were nine million Christians in Africa. In 1980 there were 200 million. Sometime in 1987 there will be a statistical balance of Christian population between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. After that, most of the world's Christians will be Latin Americans, African.

How will it ever be different? We will have to think differently - politically, geographically, and theologically. We will have to be willing to entertain the notion that the Judeo Christian tradition, and Western Civilization, may not be the only expressions the Lord of the whole creation has used. We may have to relinquish our comfortable provincialism and acknowledge that the God of all people has been at work in all of history, not just ours. One African theologian said it eloquently, as a question: "Was God not there in other times and in such places as Mount Fugi and Mt. Kenya, as well as Mt. Sinai?" (John Mbiti, Theologians in Transition, p. 54)

It is time, Madeline L'Engle - Episcopal Layperson, one of my favorite writers suggests, to stop discussing Christian unity and to leap across boundaries. It is time - obviously - to learn how to think anew which often times, for Christians, is merely a matter of learning how to think in Biblical terms.

Listen now to God's word - first, the prophet Isaiah: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.

"It will be said on that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'" (Isaiah 25:6-9)

Centuries later, Jesus lived out the promise, and wept over the brokenness of the creation, and died to make it whole, and in his resurrection was recognized in an act of reconciliation and healing. Listen to the Gospel according to Luke.

"So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?' And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread."
(Luke 24:28-35)

Restoration of Jerusalem

The Kingdom of God, that same favorite writer says, reminds her always of restoration. So in Isaiah, the picture is of a family at a banquet of reunion. In Luke, the love of God incarnate is recognized at dinner, around a table, when the bread is broken.

Isn't the reality of God known to us today precisely in the unbearable brokenness of the world? Isn't the imperative of the banquet reunion more urgent than ever before, precisely because of bodies broken and blood shed?

Perhaps our job this day is simply to weep over the brokenness, and to confess our complicity with or at least our consenting silence in the face of the mentalities which divide the family. Perhaps, as Martin Marty suggested last week, the mission of Christians on this day is to make particular, and specific, and individual the atrocity which was done, to make certain that someone remembers that depersonalized media statics are actually men and women and children.

And perhaps our job is to dream dreams of peace, and to see visions of justice and harmony and to celebrate that magnificent portent of the God of all wiping every tear away.

I know our job is somehow to get on with it: to carry all of that to the table and somehow to confess our responsibility for the world as it is and to confess our desparate need for forgiveness and new power, and simply to ask God to help us get on with this job of living as he wants us to live.

I know that the picture of the earth taken from the surface of the moon is more eloquent than what I have been trying to say. And I know that Isaiah's wonderful banquet and Luke's gentle supper say more about God's way and God's will than anybody's homily on the occasion. And I know that this day is important because Christians on every continent are gathered around a table - but that it has to do ultimately with you and me and the private places in our hearts: that the new love required for us to get on with the job of living together - really has to do with God's love for us as individuals, as beloved children who need first to be at peace with him.

So let us come to table - with brothers and sisters we have never seen - but whose grandchildren will share with our grandchildren whatever future we make.

So let us come to table with one another, here - in this place, acknowledging our differences, and in spite of them our intent to go on learning what it means to love one another.

So ~~there~~ then - let us come - anticipating that the risen Lord will meet us: that in bread broken and wine poured out he will love us and wipe away every tear and give us power to live and love in the world as his people. Amen.